

INFO	LOG-00	AF-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	PDI-00
	DS-00	DHSE-00	EUR-00	FBIE-00	VCI-00	H-00	TEDE-00
	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00	M-00
	VCIE-00	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	ISN-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00	PA-00
	MCC-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	ISNE-00	DOHS-00	FMPC-00	SSO-00
	STPD-00	NCTC-00	CBP-00	SCRS-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	SCA-00	CARC-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	FA-00	SWCI-00
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FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9273
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BAKU PRIORITY

S E C R E T YEREVAN 000474

NOFORN

FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY STEINBERG
FROM AMBASSADOR YOVANOVITCH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2019

TAGS: [PARM](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [TU](#) [AJ](#) [IR](#)

GG, RU, AM

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY STEINBERG VISIT
TO ARMENIA

Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶11. (S/NF) You are coming to Armenia at a pivotal moment. Delighted by the visit of the rare high-level USG visitor, President Sargsian will use the opportunity to appeal for U.S. acknowledgement and support for his foreign policy risk-taking. On Turkey-Armenia, Sargsian has stayed the course, but recently has expressed concerns that Turkey may not honor its commitments. He will ask that Washington exert more pressure on Turkey to de-link the Turkey-Armenia process from the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) talks. The President will argue that unhelpful public statements from Ankara and bellicose rhetoric from Baku make it difficult for him to show flexibility on N-K. Sargsian will downplay our concerns about democracy and human rights, pointing to the recent amnesty that led to the release of many opposition supporters. He will reassure you of his commitment to strengthen Armenia's export controls to mitigate the Iran arms issue. Your visit is an opportunity to encourage Sargsian's bold foreign policy toward Turkey, stress the need for more progress on NK, highlight our expectations for progress on democracy and human rights, and convey the seriousness of the export control issue. END SUMMARY.

THE RARE USG HIGH-LEVEL VISITOR

¶12. (C) You are setting a welcome, positive tone by visiting Yerevan so early in the new Administration. Armenian leaders frequently complain that top USG officials bypass Armenia on their trips to Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. In fact, the only Secretary of State to visit was James Baker in 1992. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott visited in 1999, and Richard Armitage visited in 2004; there have been no presidential visits to Armenia. While these complaints may appear puerile, such visits count for the easily-slighted Armenians, and they go a long way in building the credit with senior officials that we need at critical times like this. Although Armenia does not have the same kind of strategic importance for the United States as its neighbors, there are enough vital issues at stake in the region -- and enough opportunities for Armenia to play the spoiler -- that we need Armenia's support to advance our interests. Greater engagement on our part will likely open doors for cooperation

in other areas.

TURKEY-ARMENIA RAPPROCHEMENT

13. (C) Your visit comes at a time when President Sargsian has taken significant political risks to achieve normalization with Turkey, but so far has little to show for it. The President is under attack from all sides -- the Diaspora, the opposition, former President Kocharian, and some within his own ruling coalition -- for the April 22 joint statement with Turkey announcing a framework and road map to normalize relations. His critics argue that Sargsian allowed Turkey to avoid "genocide" recognition without getting concrete progress toward a border opening.

14. (C) Repeated statements from Ankara conditioning progress on normalization with Armenian concessions on the Nagorno Karabakh (N-K) conflict have increased the pressure on the GOAM to show results from the Turkey process, and made it more difficult for the Armenians to show flexibility on N-K. The GOAM is privately bitter, wondering whether its critics are correct that the GOT is only interested in avoiding "genocide" recognition, and increasingly questioning Ankara's commitment to normalization. President Sargsian, who has been restrained publicly, has become almost cynical in his view of Turkey's intentions toward Armenia, and increasingly pessimistic about the prospects for forward movement.

15. (C) Sargsian has set an October deadline for progress toward a border opening, without which he will not travel to Turkey for the return World Cup soccer match. We believe this deadline -- which Sargsian has stated repeatedly and publicly -- is real. In the absence of genuine progress by October, the current Turkey-Armenia process will likely come to an end, with little likelihood that it will be resumed during Sargsian's tenure. The President and FM Nalbandian reject linkage of Turkey-Armenia with the N-K process, but recognize privately that progress on N-K will make it easier for the GOT to move forward. Sargsian's initiative to Turkey is the cornerstone of his foreign policy, and the Armenians badly want to close the deal. Consequently, they can likely be persuaded to show additional flexibility on N-K, as long as the processes are kept separate.

16. (C) Your visit is an opportunity to recognize Sargsian's statesmanship in the face of strong criticism and Turkey's linkage of the Nagorno-Karabakh process to Turkey-Armenia normalization; reassure him that we are pressuring Turkey to move the process forward; and encourage him to continue on a constructive path. You should stress that a deal is within reach, but we need Armenia to show patience and flexibility, and avoid statements that could damage the process. You should underscore that real progress on N-K in Moscow will allow the Turks to move forward more resolutely. Sargsian genuinely believes that rapprochement is the right thing for the region and for Armenia's future, but will be looking for strong support from the U.S.

NAGORNO KARABAKH

17. (C) Nagorno-Karabakh is an existential issue that unites Armenians at home and abroad. Suggestions of compromise brought down Armenia's first president, and a serious misstep could result in the same fate for Sargsian -- a risk he is well aware of. The GOT's linkage of normalization with concessions on NK is making it more difficult for the GOAM to move forward on NK, as Sargsian's critics will view GOAM flexibility on N-K as "giving in" to the Turks. The Armenians will point out that President Aliyev's periodic bellicose rhetoric complicates the NK talks.

18. (C) In view of these constraints, we can expect Sargsian to proceed on NK with caution until he feels he can trust Aliyev and sell a deal to an already skeptical political

establishment and public. Sargsian will be listening for your assurances that the highest levels of the U.S. government will remain actively engaged in the process. We recommend you acknowledge the Armenians' frustration with Turkey's linkage of normalization and a border opening with a resolution of N-K, and note the USG view that there should be no preconditions. At the same time, you can emphasize the historic opportunity and the need for Armenia to be realistic -- that further progress in Moscow on N-K will reassure the Azerbaijanis that their fears about Turkey-Armenia normalization are unfounded, and make it easier for the Turks to move forward with Armenia.

MIXED, LARGELY NEGATIVE RECORD ON DEMOCRACY

¶ 9. (C) Armenia's record on democracy is mixed but largely negative, and played a role in the June 10 decision by the MCC Board to continue the hold on USD 60 million in assistance for rehabilitating Armenia's rural roads. President Sargsian has relied on the post-Soviet model of managed democracy, stifling the opposition and independent media, and punishing pro-opposition businesspeople. He has occasionally intervened -- usually when pressured by the Council of Europe -- to mitigate democratic setbacks. For example, Armenia's parliament on June 19 declared a president-sponsored amnesty that freed approximately 30 of the 50 opposition supporters jailed in March 2008 following post-election violence. Early in June, however, Sargsian disbanded a bipartisan fact-finding group of experts he had established in October 2008 to investigate the circumstances of the post-election clashes that left 10 dead. To date, not a single police officer or member of Armenia's security services has been held accountable for their role in the violence.

¶ 10. (C) The May 31 Yerevan mayoral election was marred by widespread intimidation, fraud and irregularities. Although Sargsian said he'd prosecute vote-riggers, the four who were given prison time have since walked free courtesy of the amnesty. The authorities continue to control the electronic media, restricting licenses for independent media and frequently squelching content that is overly critical of the regime. Attacks, usually unsolved, against journalists have been a constant problem, especially against investigative journalists and those who write unflattering articles on the rich and powerful. While freedom of assembly has improved over the last year, assembly requests are still occasionally denied and opposition supporters harassed when they attempt to publicize demonstrations. It is important that we send a clear message that improvement in democracy and human rights is key to Armenia's political and economic development, as well as our bilateral relations.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON THE IRAN ARMS ISSUE

¶ 11. (S/NF) Since this issue came to light last fall, we have been in regular engagement with the President and Foreign Minister on ways to ensure such an arms sale never happens again. Since the March signing of the Joint Action Plan on export controls, we have had two visits to Armenia by U.S. arms control and munitions lists experts. The Armenians say they will meet their commitments within the agreed-to timeline, and senior officials have ensured the active cooperation of technical specialists from the various government agencies. However, there are problems of coordination and serious shortcomings in Armenia's approach to export controls. A recent negative development, which the Armenians are being briefed on, was the June 10 attack in Iraq on four more U.S. servicemen with weapons from the 2003 illicit arms shipment. You should make clear that this issue remains an impediment to our bilateral agenda, particularly in light of the new developments in Iraq, and stress that the USG needs to see concrete, timely progress on implementation of the Joint Action Plan. The GOAM has promised to provide

copies of the newly revised decrees on export controls by July 15, which are then supposed to be finalized and signed by the Prime Minister by September 1. Armenia needs to meet these deadlines to mitigate the negative fallout from this issue.

YOVANOVITCH